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The reality of the PM_{2.5} problems

~ The importance of referring to primary information ~

Tomoaki Okuda

In Japan the government established environmental standards for PM_{2.5} in 2009. In 2013, the outbreak in China of PM_{2.5} high concentration was banded about as an issue of serious concern. Indeed, PM_{2.5} is now a major social issue. It was more than a decade ago that I became involved in PM_{2.5} as a research scientist. But I could hardly imagine that my research target, PM_{2.5}, would come to the fore as one of the most popular keywords (The 30th “Top Ten You-Can Keywords of the Year” Awards, 2013)

However, I often feel like something is wrong with the way mass media report on PM_{2.5}. As far as I know, the actual

state of things about PM_{2.5} is as follows:

① It's not true that the average PM_{2.5} concentration in Japan has been rising over the past several years; ② Admitting that in January 2013 PM_{2.5} concentration in China was higher than the average for the past, that of Japan for the same period remained unchanged; ③ Except the cases of exceptionally high PM_{2.5} concentration outdoors, normally there is little difference between outdoor and indoor concentrations; and ④ Wearing a mask to avoid inhaling PM_{2.5} is almost nothing but a placebo because it's very difficult to use a mask closely adhered to your face. ... What do you think? You may have found that my points are pretty much different from the impressions you received from mass media reports. Especially from 2013 to 2014, I was repeatedly asked to give public lectures on PM_{2.5}. Most of the audience appeared surprised at what I indicated.

To tell the truth, the data behind my opinion are all published by reliable public organizations. In other words, anyone can access such primary information. To our regret, mass media reports often fail to communicate primary information correctly. More than once did I say to myself, “How did they draw such an interpretation from this primary information!”

Such is not limited to PM_{2.5} problems. If you have come across news you are curious about, refer to primary information as much as possible so that you can properly interpret the problem on your own. This is a very important ability given that our modern society is flooded with information of all kinds. In my classwork, therefore, my students are encouraged to develop their own opinions through discussions on environmental problems, using reliable primary information.

Science and Technology Information

The 16th KEIO TECHNO-MALL 2015 “More Partnerships, More Dreams”

KEIO TECHNO-MALL is an annual event to widely disseminate research results from the Keio Faculty and Graduate School of Science and Technology while also serving as a vital venue of encounters for industry-academia-government collaborations such as joint research and technological transfer.

At booths, you can see faculty members and students making presentations of their research results through real-machine demonstrations or display of posters. Every year, this event attracts many visitors – from businesses, government/public organizations, and other universities, etc.



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Date: December 4 (Fri.), 2015 10:00 ~ 18:00

Venue: Tokyo International Forum (Exhibition Hall 2, Basement 2)

Featured main event:

“Brain, Mind and Happiness” by Prof. Takashi Maeno (Graduate School of System Design and Management) and others

Round-table sessions:

“Engineering Approach to the Environment Issues” by Prof. Toshihisa Ueda, facilitator (Department of Mechanical Engineering)

“Future Society with Intelligent Robots” by Prof. Takahira Yamaguchi, facilitator (Department of Administration Engineering)

Editor's postscript

Dr. Okuda is seriously tackling problems relating to PM_{2.5}. I could see his devoted attitude while interviewing him. From time to time, he appeared particularly eager to let us have the correct knowledge of PM_{2.5}. I would like you to read the column on this page, which may drastically change your stereotype idea about PM_{2.5}.

The photograph on the front cover is an attempt to show Dr. Okuda collaborating with the particle sampler which is his original development and is installed outdoors. Although I couldn't imagine how the photo would work out until the front cover design was completed, the blue sky-like background was marvelously reproduced. It was a satisfactory finish that well reflected the image of his research.

(Manami Matsubayashi)



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